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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the potential for creative language production through poetry writing in the foreign language class. Specific techniques and activities which stimulate creative thinking, speaking, and writing in the foreign language are presented. The techniques are (1) collaboration poem-wishes; (2) comparison poems; (3) metaphor poems; (4) personification poems; (5) color poems; (6) poems based on photographs, pictures, or slides; (7) writing poems about mental images; (8) poems written to music; (9) formal devices, such as the five-line poem and the Haiku; and (10) poems based on a class trip. The presentation of each technique provides suggestions for the teacher, examples in Spanish poetry, and some outlines of the activity itself. Suggestions regarding evaluation and a summary of the advantages of teaching poetry writing complete the article. (Author/AMP)

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Poetry-Writing in the Foreign Language Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a form of communication which can express a range of human experience and emotion beyond the confines of the limited lexicon of every language. Succince, yet laden with images, associations and impressions and utilizing the unique rhythn and music of language, poetic and figurative expression probably reflects the workings of the mind more closely than expository prose, which has generally been emphasized as exclusively significant in the foreign language classroom. (1) One goal of foreign language instruction must be the ability to express creatively and freely the richness of relevant experience. Poetry writing is an appropriate vehicle for this type of expression and it may be presented in a manner which stimulates creative thinking and creative oral production in the foreign language as well.

It has been noted that.."In describing the competence of an ideal speaker-hearer, generative theorists have restricted themselves to "normal" language, i.e. language that can be interpreted

literally, with the assumption that figurative or poetic language can be explained in terms of deviance either from the rules of normal language or in their application." (2). Yet figurative language is acknowledged as a significant feature of every day speech.. (3) The language of poetry is also beleived to be a reflection of the language of the unconscious. (4)

S. Pit Corder, in attempting to clarify the term "error" in reference to a language learner's utterances, discusses the language of poetry. He states:

> "What are we to say about the language of of some poets? It often shows deliberate breaches of the code. Each poet may break a different set of rules. Do we speak about these breaches as errors? On the contrary, we accept them as a legitimate device of the poet to express in the standard code, to force the reader to see the familiar world through new eyes or to "restructure" his picture of the world through a "recaterorization" of the language. It has even been suggested that the language of a poet should be regarded as an <u>idiosyncratic dialect</u>, but one which bears a regular relation to the standard dialect. It is fruitful to regard the language of a learner as an idiosyncratic dialect also." (5)

The foreign language teacher is faced with the challange of stimulating his students to transform their "idiosyncratic dialect" into poetry. In seeking innovation and originality of expression, the

poet must avoid the stereotypical constructions prevalent in every language which cannot communicate a novel image. The language learner is unfamiliar with many of the conventions and rules of the new code. He is generally unaware of the trite expressions and common metaphors of the target language. Its sounds and rhythms are novel and exciting..He brings a freshness of perception which may be considered a valuable asset in creative thinking and writing in the foreign language.

Poetry written by elementary school children, who are still in the process of learning their native language, exhibits incredible freshness and freedom of perception and expression. (6) Upon reading these poems, one is immediately struck by the excitingly successful combination of lexical, morphological and syntactical simplicity and vivid imagery. The imagination, sensitivity and freedom of association revealed in children's poetry demonstrate creative power which can and should be unleashed in the foreign language classroom as well.

The language learner should be encouraged to develop greater expressive versatility, to use all of

his resources creatively. The limited, repetitious, concrete contexts and situations often presented in the foreign language classroom must tend to reinforce the learner's feelings of limitation and inhibition. The opportunity for imaginative and figurative expression would stimulate the creative recombination of his knowledge, an important goal of foreign language instruction, and would provide new and broader contexts for language production.

TECHNIQUES FOR STIMULATING POETRY-WRITING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Various techniques have been developed for teaching poetry writing to children and teen-agers. (7) I have adapted several of these techniques for use in the foreign language classroom. Examples are given in English and Spanish.

It is recommended that the classroom teacher elicit a definition of poetry from the class before introducing any of the suggested activities. It is important to dispel notions of poetry as obscure, irrelevant language with rhyme or meter. For the purposes of these activities poetry should be defined as the creative expression of relevant experience,

thoughts and feelings.

For formal unity, repetition of various elements rather than rhyme or meter is stressed. A preoccupation with the latter might tend to stifle creativity. Students should; however, be encouraged to associate the sounds and rhythms of the language with the feelings and ideas they wish to express. They should be encouraged to give free reign to their imaginations, trying to associate feelings and think creatively in the target language. Translation from the native language should be discouraged. The teacher may act as a resource, helping with lexical or grammatical problems, but being careful not to impose his own thoughts or ideas on the students.

Appropriate selections of poetry in the target language should be read to exemplify specific aspects of imagery or figurative language and to stimulate the students imaginations. Examples from Spanish poetry are included.

I. Collaboration Poem-Wishes

As an introductory activity, a collaboration poem whith one line supplied by each member of the

class, can be extremely effective. The teacher should should set up specific guidelines and supply one line of the poem as an example. A Wish Poem Collaboration might have the following guidelines:

1. Each line should begin with "I wish..."(in the target language) ("Quiero"..."Me gustaría""Deseo")
2. Each line should contain a color.
3. Each line should contain a place (fictional or real)
4. Each line should contain a person (fictional or real)

The teacher should supply the first line which might itself be evoked by a poem. For example, as an introductory oral activity, the class could read and idscuss the color imagery in the firs stanza of "Romance Sonambulo" by Federico Garcia Lorca. The teacher might then supply the following line, or a similar one which also follows the guidelines:
Teacher example: "Quiero viajar por el verde viento a la luna gitana con Federico García Lorca."

Each student would be required to write out his line, following the prescribed guidelines, and hand

it in. The teacher, after noting and correcting errors , could read each line to the class, or have each student read his own line, if they prefer. The The students could then arrange the lines in some type of order, with the teacher's guidance. These could be written on the board or on an overhead projector. The final product could be put on a ditto. The class could then read their work together discussing the most imaginative and successful lines and images. A collaboration can become a competitive activity with students trying to outdo each other creatively. Collaborations can also be done in small groups by two or more students who prefer to work together. The following techniques may be carried out as collaborations or as individual works.

II. Comparison Poems

Vocabulary used to express comparisons in the target language should be presented or reviewed, noting correct grammatical usage. (Some examples in Spanish include: "como, tal, cual, semejante-parecer semejar")

Examples of comparisons from poetry in the target language should be read and their effective-

ness discussed. Some examples from Spanish poetry follow:

1. Como enjambre de abejas irritadas
de un oscuro rincón de la memoria
salen a perseguirme los recuerdos
de las pasadas horas.
"Rima LXIV"
Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

2. Abandonado como las muelles en el alba
"La Canción Desesperada"
Pablo Neruda

3. Pero como el amor
los saeteros
son ciegos
"Poema de la Saeta"
Federico García Lorca

4. Como la una de la carne así apartándose van
"Cantar de Mío Cid"

As an initial oral activity the teacher could present the class with a list of words, choosing both concrete and abstract vocabulary, the the target language, and have the students supply oral comparisons. A sample vocabulary list follows:

1. estrella
2. nube
3. pájaro
4. fuego
5. sol
6. nieve
7. cielo
8. hoja
9. luna
10. sombra
11. temor
12. amor
13. esperanza
14. pensamientos
15. odio
16. amistad
17. alegría
18. tristeza
19. soledad
20. sueños

Students should be encouraged to make both concrete and abstract comparisons. The teacher should supply an example such as the following: "Mis pensamientos vuelan como las nubes."

Have the class write comparison poems. The students should feel free to make unusual, imaginative comparisons as long as they have some personal relevance. As a guideline for unity of form the students could repeat "como" or other comparative vocabulary at the same point in each line.

III. Metaphor poems

Several examples of metaphors from poetry in the target language should be read. Some examples from Spanish poetry follow:

1. Góndola de alabastro
   bogando en el azul, la luna avanza;
   "Claro de Luna"
   Pablo Neruda

2. Se va la noche, negro toro
   plena carne de luto, de espanto y de misterio;
   que ha bramado terrible, inmensamente,
   al temor sudoroso de todos los caídos;
   "Desvelo"
   Juan Ramon Jimenez

3. Nuestras vidas son los ríos
   que van a dar en la mar
   que es el morir

1. "Coplas"
Jorge Manrique

The teacher should elicit a definition of metaphor from the class. Have the class differentiate metaphors from comparisons or similes.

As a preliminary oral activity, the same type of word list used to stimulate the production of comparisons may be used to elicit metaphors. Students might try transforming their own comparisons into metaphors.

Have the class write metaphor poems utilizing the following guidelines: 1. Introduce a metaphor, pretending that something really is something else, and then elaborate this idea in the following lines of the poem. For example:

La nube, almohada blanca y suave,
pasa por el cielo.
Duermo en las nubes...

or 2. Introduce a new metaphor in every line, using parallel structures for unity of form, with variations for emphasis. An example follows:

Las nubes, almohadas blancas, vuelan
El cielo, manta azul, espera.
La tierra, cama incómoda, queda.
Sueño con las nubes.

IV. Personification Poems

Read examples of personifications from poetry in the target language and discuss their effectiveness. Some examples from Spanish poetry follow:

1. ¿Que es poesía?-dices mientras clavas
en mi pupila tu pupila azul-
¿Qué es poesía? y tu me lo preguntas
Poesía....eres tu.
"Rima XXI"
Gustavo Adolfo Becquer

2. Hoy la tierra y los cielos me sonríen;
"Rima XVII"
Gustavo Adolfo Becquer

3. Y el día viene, nono fresco,
pidiendo confianza, amor y risa.
"Desvelo"
Juan Ramon Jimenez

4. Poderoso caballero
es don Dinero
Madre, yo al oro me humillo
el es mi amante y mi amado.
"Poderoso Caballero es
don Dinero
Francisco de Quevedo

5. Así terminara
en paz
esta carrera
del vegetal armado
que se llama alcachofa
luego
escama por escama
desvestimos
la delicia
y comemos
la pacífica pasta
de su corazón verde.
"Oda a la alcachofa"
Pablo Neruda

As a preliminary oral activity, the teacher might show the class various objects, or list them on the board, and ask them to think of human characteristics or feelings that they could imagine for these objects. Ask the students to pretend that they actually are the objects. Ask them (in the target language): What would happen to them? How would they feel? The following items might be effective: a seashell, a watch, a blank piece of paper, a light bulb, a match, a flower, a mirror, various fruits or vegetables, a book, the floor, the sky, a window, the sea. Abstract concepts might also be personified such as love, laughter, peace, anger, etc.

Have the students write poems using personification with the following guidelines: 1. Pretend that an object or abstract concept is a person and write about it. Or 2. Imagine that you are an object or abstract concept and write a poem about how you'd feel, what you'd do or what might happen to you.

V. Color poems

As an introductory oral activity, the teacher might display different colored pieces of paper and instruct the class to identify each color in the

target language. The students could then discuss, also in the target language, whatever ideas and associations the colors bring to mind. To further stimulate their imaginations the students might be instructed to close their eyes and identify the color of different sounds. The teacher might drop keys, ring a bell, pour water, blow a whistle, bang on the desk, use sandpaper, clap her hands together or do whatever comes to mind to produce sound. In addition the following or similar types of questions could be discussed orally in the target language:

1. De que color es el cielo?
2. De que color es un beso?
3. De que color es la alegria?
4. De que color es la tristeza?
5. De que color es una sonrisa?
6. De que color es el amor?
7. De que color es el enojo?
8. De que color es la primavera?
9. De que color es el odio?
10. De que color es el numero uno?

Read examples of the effective use of color from poetry in the target language. Examples from Spanish poetry follow:

1. Por el llano, por el viento
   jaca negra, luna roja.
   La muerte me esta mirando
   desde las torres de Cordoba
   "Cancion de Jinete"
   Federico Garcia Lorca

2. Verde que te quiere verde.
Verde viento. Verdes ramas.
El barco sobre la mar
Y el caballo en la montaña.
Con la sombra en la cintura
ella suena en la baranda
verde carne, pelo verde,
con ojos de frío plata.
Verde que te quiero verde.
Bajo la luna gitana,
las cosas la están mirando
y ella no puede mirarlas.

"Romance Sonámbulo"
Federico García Lorca

Students might try writing color poems with the following guidelines: 1. Associate colors freely. 2. Put a color on every line, using different colors or repeating colors that are being emphasized. Or 3. Devote a whole poem to one color or different shades of the same color. 4. Try using comparisons, metaphors and/or personifications whith colors.

VI. Poems based on Photographs, Pictures of Slides

Bring in photographs or slides that you think your students would respond or relate to in some way Also, have the students bring in pictures that they or their families have taken or that they find interesting. These might include baby pictures, pictures of vacations, or of important events in their lives, nature scenes, cars, sporting events, etc. Slides of works of art, modern art in particular, may evoke

interesting responses. Pictures from illustrated books of poetry may also be effective.(8)

As a preliminary oral activity, have the students discuss, in the target language, their reactions to the photographs or slides. They may enjoy describing or explaining pictures that they've brought to class.

Have the students write poems based on any photograph, picture or slide that they find inspiring. The following guidelines are suggested: 1. Describe the picture 2. Describe your reaction to it 3. Pretend that you are actually in the picture and describe a real or an imagined experience. 4. Use metaphors, comparisons, personifications and/or colors.

VII. Draw the image in your mind and write about it.

Students should be reminded that poets paint pictures with words. Several examples of imagery from poetry in the target language should be read. Some examples from Spanish poetry follow:

1. En el limón cortaron
   los cuchillos
   una pequeña
   catedral
   el abside escondido

abrió a la luz los acidos vitrales
y en gotas
resbalaron los topacios
los altares
las fresca arquitectura.
"Oda al limón"
Pablo Neruda

2. La Aurora de Nueva York tiene
cuatro columnas de cieno
y un huracán de negras palomas
que chapotean las aguas podridas.
"La Aurora"
Federico García Lorca

3. Hacia Madrid, una noche,
va el tren por el Guadarrama
En el cielo, el arco iris
que hacen la luna y el agua.
Oh, luna de abril serena
que empuja las nubes blancas!
"Iris de la noche"
Antonio Machado

As a preliminary oral activity, the class might discuss, in the target language, the images that certain ideas or concepts bring to mind. Examples of concepts which may eleicit interesting images follow:

1. Paradise
2. The Year 2000
3. Peace
4. Freedom
5. Speed
6. Flying
7. A Surprise
8. Daybreak
9. Nightfall
10. Disaster

Have the students actually draw the images visualized in their minds, thus giving concrete form

to their associations. Next, have the students write poems describing their drawings.

VIII. Poems written to music

Play records or tapes of music that evokes different moods and associations. Some suggestions follow: 1. Classical music. For example the various movements of Beethoven's symphonies which express different moods. 2. Rock 3. Disco 4. Jazz 5. Music from the target culture or from different countries and cultures.

As a preliminary oral activity, students should discuss, in the target language, their reactions to the various types of music. Students might be asked to close their eyes while listening to the music. The teacher could then ask them the following types of questions in the target language: 1. Where are you 2. What do you see? 3. What's happening around you? 4. Is it day or night? 5. What do you feel like doing?

Have the students write poems while listening to music. Let the students choose the record or tape that they would like to listen to while writing.

They might prefer to use music that they themselves have brought in. Where available, a language lab or a designated music listening area should be utilized, to minimize interference.

Students should be encouraged to use elements of poetry that they've studied, such as metaphors, comparisons, personification etc. After completing their poems, students might enjoy reading them to the class, playing the music that they wrote by as a background for their works.

IX. Formal Devices- The Cinquain and Haiku

After the students have had the opportunity to use their imaginations and expressive abilities without being hampered by restrictions of form, some simple formal techniques might be presented and tried. The "Cinquain" - Present the class with the following rules for writing a five line poem:

Line 1 A noun

Line 2 two adjectives that describe the noun

Line 3 three verbs that describe the noun

Line 4 a phrase that describes the noun

Line 5 the noun again, or a synonym, or a related

word.

An exampl in Spanish follows:

Cielo
Azul, negro
Moviendo, mirando, riendo
Posee el sol y la luna
Espacio

"Haiku"-Present the class with the following rules for writing Haiku: 1. The traditional Japanese Haiku consists of seventeen syllables in three lines of five, seven and five. Students may vary the number of syllables, but should maintain three or four lines. 2. Some reference to nature should be made. 3. A particular event should be referred to. 4. An emotion aroused by one particular event should be conveyed as simply and succinctly as possible.

In the Spanish classroom, examples of "Haikai" by Flavio Herrera might be read and their effectiveness discussed before students attempt their own works. Several examples follow:

DESTINO

Sabe la flor que por ella
se resigna la raíz
a no conocer la estrella?

LAS GAVIOTAS

La mano candida del cielo
deja caer al mar
hecho jirones su pañuelo.

EL HAIKAI

Emoción. Síntesis. Bruma.
Todo el milagro del mar
en una gota de espuma.

X. Poems Based on a Class Trip.

A class trip may be planned to evoke fresh perspectives and new experiences. Possible places of interest might include a zoo, a park, a museum or any historical or natural site that may be of interest to the students. Related vocabulary should be presented before the trip. Oral discussions, in the target language, of experiences and observations should follow the trip. The students should be encouraged to write poems about unique aspects of their experience, employing metaphors, comaprisons, imagery, etc.

EVALUATION

Poems should not be graded. However; originality, sensitivity and keen perceptions and insights should be praised. Students enjoy reading each others work.

They may enjoy putting together a poetry magazine consisting of their original poems and illustrations.

CONCLUSION

Providing students with the opportunity to express themselves creatively in a second language should arouse an arouse an appreciation of the potential power they are acquiring. Poetry writing can free the language learner from the emotionless concrete boundaries too often established in a foreign language, thus expanding spontaneous expressive and communicative abilities. Personal involvement in the creative process should also stimulate appreciation and enjoyment of poetry as a genre, uniquely communicative in every language.

Notes

1. See Nancy Arapoff, "Writing: A Thinking Process," TESOL Quarterly 1 (1967), pp. 33-39
2. Katherine Hammar, "Metaphor and Symbol as 'Deviant' Language, "Studies in Language, Vol 3. No. 2. (1979), p. 210
3. Weller Embler, Metaphor and Meaning (Jacksonville, Florida: Convention Press, Inc. 1966) pp. 27-44.
4. See Jacques Lacan,"The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud""Ecrits, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977)
5. Introducing Applied Linguistics (Hammondsworth, Great Britain: Penguin, 1973) p. 260.
6. Kenneth Koch, Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry (New York: Random House, 1970).
7. Ibid. and Charlene Whisnant and Jo Hassett, Word Magic (New York: Doubleday, 1974) and Joseph Szabo, Almost Grown (New York: Crown, 1978)
8. Joseph Szabo, Op. Cit. contains excellent photographs of teen-agers.